

Gallery Guide

LIVES OF THE LEGATION: BUILDER, WARTIME CONSUL, PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER



BUILDER: Maxwell Blake (1877 Kansas City, Missouri – 1959 Kansas City)

Maxwell Blake was Tangier's longest serving US consul-general (1912-22, 1925-40). During the quarter-century he lived here, Blake hired Moroccan artisans to repair and develop the Legation. (One brilliant example: local craftsmen re-coated the building with lime once a year to control the damp that continues to threaten it even today.) To enhance the entrance patio and stairway, he brought a marble fountain from Fez as well as polished bricks and wrought ironwork from Spain. He had the marble mantelpieces on this floor sent from Italy. To create the Arab Pavilion in 1930, Blake used State Department funds, and sometimes his own money, to buy beautiful fittings like doors, ceilings, tiles from Fez.

In his office just beneath this former bedroom, Blake lobbied officials to ensure US manufacturers had equal access to the markets he saw diversifying here in the 1930s. A careful analyst of political developments in Morocco, Blake sent reports to the State Department expressing sympathy with Moroccan grievances against the French protectorate. He also expressed his own hopes that the French would soon display toward Moroccans a "new regime of fair play, good faith, mutual respect and humane understanding" (1937).

Blake was not only a sharp analyst and keen aesthete. He was also a stern, even harsh, father. He saddened his two children by his second wife, Rosita, a Gibraltarian, by forbidding them from to keep pets in their home, as his son John laments in a locally published book.

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WARTIME CONSUL: James Rives Childs (1893 Lynchburg, Virginia – 1987 Richmond, Virginia)

James Rives Childs arrived in Tangier in 1941, ten months before the US entered World War Two, and served as Chargé d'Affaires until 1945. Under his watch, the Legation served as a "vantage point" for reporting on German and Spanish troop movements and shipping. When the reports were tapped out in the telegraph room at the top of the stairs, it is rumored that Mrs. Childs was disturbed by the racket as she tried to sleep. Security was so strict that even she did not know her husband's staff was helping to plan the 1942 Allied invasion.

Rives Childs noted his staff was unusually large "to the intense annoyance of the Axis," because it was made up largely of "military, air, and naval personnel as well as intelligence and counter-intelligence agents." He calculated that two hundred spies were then operating in Tangier. Among them was a Spanish "charwoman" in the Legation who had been bribed by the Germans to photograph his papers with a miniature camera. She was dismissed before the group photograph on the wall was taken.

Rives Childs used his personal relationships with high Spanish officials to try to prevent Spain and Spanish Morocco from helping the Axis powers by, for example, selling them oil they had been allowed to import from America. By exploiting one such friendship, he successfully obtained Spanish visas for 1200 Hungarian Jews.

Rives Childs and the French Resident-General General Noguès respected one another. However, the American understood that Noguès' goals -- to keep the French Empire intact and to avoid giving the Germans an excuse to invade North Africa -- made him an unreliable ally.

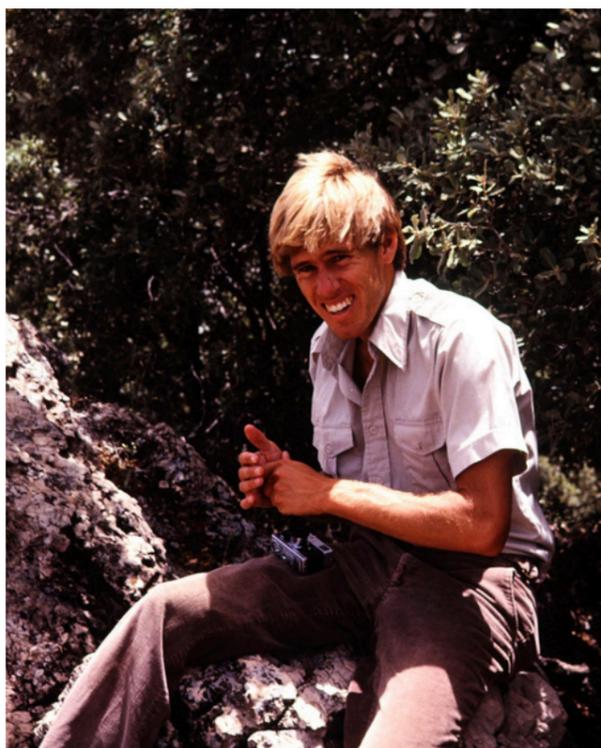
Rives Childs' highest priority was always the victory of the Allies. The US challenge, as he understood it, was to reconcile opposing Moroccan and French interests. He acknowledged the "legitimate aspirations" of all nations for a "greater share in their government" until they were able to "decide freely their own fate." At the same time, he feared weakening the local power of the French before the Axis was defeated.

Multi-talented and erudite, Rives Childs later served as US ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. He also wrote fourteen books, five of them on the subject of Venetian adventurer Casanova.

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE FROM THE MUSEUM

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER - J. Christopher Stephens

(1960 Grass Valley, California - 2012 Benghazi, Libya)



Chris Stevens' love of Morocco, and the Middle East generally, began when he served as a Peace Corps Volunteer here from 1983 to 1985. With 84 other volunteers, he trained in Azrou, working hard to learn both classical and Moroccan Arabic. (One trainer called his command "beautiful.") He went on to teach English to 270 students in a high school located in the small Middle Atlas town of Ouaouizerth, where he also set about learning the local Amazigh (Berber) dialect.

Stevens' students remember his kindness: he went out of his way to chat with them after games of basketball; to save weaker students from embarrassment, he gave tests back after class; he treated his most dedicated learners to extra hours of instruction. One of his fellow volunteers said Stevens "represented the very best of the Peace Corps ... inquisitive, culturally adept, and warm-hearted with everyone he met." Others remember his many interests – hiking, running, tennis, playing the saxophone. (Some joke that he looked like the ideal Californian because he was a blond athlete whose khaki trousers were always perfectly pressed.) In 1984, Stevens volunteered to spend a summer helping to organize the library in this building.

Returning to California, Stevens attended law school and joined the Foreign Service in 1991. After serving as a diplomat in Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Riyadh, Tripoli, he became in May, 2012, US ambassador to Libya. On September 11, 2012, he was visiting Benghazi with the goal of reopening its US consulate, closed since the Libyan civil war. A terrorist attack on the compound killed him and three other Americans. His parents objected when certain American politicians used his name and death "opportunistic[ally] and cynical[ly]" to try to sway the outcome of the 2016 US presidential elections.

The Stevens family created the Stevens Initiative as a memorial to their son in 2015. The organization aims to offer youth from the US, the Middle East, and North Africa "life changing global experiences" through virtual exchanges of ideas and resources.